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THE SIGNAL CORPS ROLE IN THE CUBAN CRISIS 1962

1. Some comments touching the World War II background

It seems that when the Army reorganized in 1962 - when signal supply and logistics, signal R&D, signal schools and training, and so on, transferred to the over-all Army Materiel Command and to other new commands -, the idea developed in the minds of many that practically all Signal Corps functions had been absorbed by other new Army activities.

Such a majority opinion, if it was really this, can perhaps be attributed to the fact that for many years the Signal Corps had been subordinated to logistic organizations - since March 1942 when the Corps was placed under the Army Service Forces (or Services of Supply) which was set up over the technical services early in World War II.

Subordination to supply hampered Signal Corps exercise of its communications control responsibilities. In the combat theaters of World War II, however, communications control won high regard. Army commanders assigned to Signal Corps officers appropriate authority and organizational position to exercise communications control on the principle that communications is a function of command. "It actually was a function of command at the time," explained Maj.Gen. F. E. Stoner, Chief of the Army Communications Service, "in all theaters and in every place except Washington."*

* G. R. Thompson and D. Harris, The Signal Corps: The Outcome (in

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manuscript), Chap XIX, p. 9 fn. See also same authors, The Signal Corps: The Test, in the U. S. ARMY IN WORLD WAR II histories, Washington, 1957, pp. 544ff.

This subordination to supply, continued in recent years under the DepCofS for Logistics, very likely engendered the idea that the Signal Corps was essentially a supply service only, obscuring to some extent any awareness that the Corps also had large important operation and control responsibilities - of Army communications world-wide, of signal policy and planning, of doctrine and communications procedure promulgation and enforcement, of signal security matters, of frequency assignment and control, of over-all communications coordination, and so on.

2. Further comments involving the 1962 CONARC Reorganization and OXFORD

CONARC, presumably following DA reorganization directives in mid-1962, ordered that CONUS Signal Officers replace their cross flags with General Staff insignia and merge with staff, to perform staff duties only, - evidently on the assumption that they would no longer control signal operations or command signal troops. The CONARC headquarters zealously set about a functional reorganization of its own structure. The staff position of Signal Officer was abolished and the Signal Staff functions were divided up and parcelled out in many bits and pieces among the newly organized vertical staff structures. Cross relations became difficult and the signal capability as a whole suffered. The senior Signal Corps Officer, assigned to Hqs CONARC

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was Colonel Norbert C. Miller, who was designated as Chief of the Signal Branch of Plans and Operations Division of the DCS Unit Training and Readiness.*

* (1) Comments of Lt. Col. E. A. Doran, P&P Office, OCSigO, 2 Apr 63. Copy in Cuban Crisis 1962 File. TL Office, USASCC. (2) Hqs Org Chart CONARC, 1 Aug 62.

The CONARC directive to CONUS armies, if fully carried out, would have practically stripped these armies of their Signal Officers. But implementing action was actually taken only in the Second Army and in the Military District of Washington. As for the implementation within the CONARC structure itself, it had a decidedly adverse effect upon Army communications in the Oxford incident, beginning in September 1962, and in the Cuban Crisis also, that began a month later, in October. In both operations the Chief Signal Officer, Maj. Gen. Earle F. Cook (located since the 1962 reorganization in Special Staff, under the DepCofS for Operations in the Washington headquarters of the Army) received some adverse criticism - for deficiencies that proved not so much of his making as a consequence of shortcomings in the reorganization and of miscomprehensions about the new status of the Signal Corps.

Toward the dispatch of troops to Oxford, Mississippi, the Chief Signal Officer was asked to assist in the planning at the outset, receiving

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guidance from DCSOPS on 14 September 1962. Called in by the Assistant DepCofS for Military Operations, Maj. Gen. C. W. Abrams, General Cook took with him Colonel W. D. Joslin, Director of the Command and Control Systems Directorate, OCSigO, and Lt. Col. Albert J. Redman, Deputy Director of the Communications Operations Directorate, U. S. Strategic Communications Command (the large field activity under the Chief Signal Officer, which maintains and operates Army's strategic communications world-wide). After General Abrams outlined the communications he desired with the several military and civil government activities involved in the Oxford operation, General Cook asked Redman what facilities could be most readily provided. Lt. Col. Redman answered that he could accomplish the desired services with SCAN (Switched Circuit Automatic Net) facilities.*

* Interv with Lt. Col. A. J. Redman, Arlington, Virginia, 22 Mar 63.
Cuban Crisis 1962 File, TL Office, USASCC.

At the peak of the operation the U. S. Army Strategic Communications Command (USASCC) provided 14 dial facilities (SCAN) in Washington, Memphis, Oxford, Jackson, and Meridan. Three secure teletypewriter circuits were provided, using facilities leased from commercial communications companies. Signal equipment and personnel were borrowed from other Signal Corps assignments to complete the needed communication nets. A large transportable radio, an AN/TSC-20, provided one voice and one secure teletypewriter

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circuit. An AN/MRC-20 provided five voice and one teletypewriter circuits. Four sets of AN/GRC-26's were available as back-up facilities, also a mobile microwave system that had been leased from AT&T. USASCC troops manned terminals in the Armory at Oxford, and in the Dept. of Army Communications Center in the Pentagon.*

* After Action Sig Rpt on the Oxford, Miss., Opns. File located in the P&P Office, OCSigO.

Communication services abounded throughout the Oxford operation, except for one incident involving Brig. Gen. C. Billingslea, Deputy Commander of the 2d Infantry Division, Ft. Benning, who was assigned command of the Brigade Task Force at Oxford. Billingslea was served by a competent Signal Officer, Lt. Col. G. Grisard. However, at the moment of the departure for Oxford, Grisard's father died. The Lt. Colonel was delayed two days, and when General Billingslea first arrived in Oxford, he did not have a signal officer with him. The General was out of touch with Washington for some hours. About four o'clock in the morning of 1 October, Lt. Col. Redman was aroused by a phone call regarding communications between the Washington headquarters and Oxford (Lt. Gen. T. W. Parker, DepCofS for Military Operations, had complained to General Cook). Although there was plenty of communications with Oxford, there was none with Billingslea for a while, to the dismay of many, till he was located.**

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**** Interv with Lt. Col. Redman, cited.**

In addition to lacking a signal officer at the outset, Billingslea did not at once designate the location he chose for his command post. Until he did so, and until the Signal Corps was so informed, so that communications could be provided, he was out of touch with the Washington headquarters.

It was the general agreement of two Signal Corps After Action Reports - one prepared by the USASCC, the other by Maj. Gen. D. P. Gibbs (then Assistant to CSigO) who went to Oxford 1 - 3 October, that some of the planning for the operation was incomplete and that commanders had not always kept signal officers properly informed of their needs and whereabouts.*

* After Action Signal Report on the Oxford Operation, cited. Gen. Gibbs added that Lt. Gen. Howze, CG of the XVIII Airborne Corps, arrived in Oxford without either signal equipment or a signal officer. Memo Gibbs for Maj. Gen. E. F. Cook, 5 Oct 62, sub: Observations on the Mississippi Operation. Same File.

It should be pointed out, too, that the Oxford Operation was more in the nature of a Civil Defense action than an Army operation. Such actions as that at Oxford ought to probably be accomplished as Civil Defense projects. It was not the sort of operation that Army contingency plans contemplate.**

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** Comments of Lt. Col. Thomas L. Redd, CCSD OCSigO, 5 Apr 63,
Arlington, Virginia. Copy in Cuban Crisis 1962 file, TL USASCC.

3. The Cuban Crisis and the Signal Corps Role therein

The communications defects of the Oxford Operation were slight compared with some of the errors and oversights that occurred in communications for the Cuban Crisis. Worst of these errors, from the point of view of General Cook himself, was the initial one - that General Staff planners began their large-scale build-up, their plans for readying a major base of operations in Florida, without calling in the CSigO personally to advise and assist (instead they called upon Lt. Col. Redman of the USASCC, whom they evidently thought was on General Cook's immediate staff, of which more hereafter).

Obviously, the Cuban effort, involving several Army Divisions and many thousands of troops, was going to require considerable over-all strategic communications support, as well as support of internal tactical communications. Strategic Army communications had of course been assigned to the Chief Signal Officer as a major responsibility (the USASCC) in the newly reorganized Army. And as for tactical communications of Army elements below the Division, although these constitute an internal command responsibility within the combat units, they stood to benefit from the policies and doctrine which the Chief Signal Officer can provide, and from the technical control and coordination which he can exert in his staff position.

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Further, in the important matters of cryptosecurity equipment and of frequency control and assignment,* the Chief Signal Officer remains

* Lt. Col. Redd pointed out there were frequency troubles in the Cuban Crisis owing to the lack of over-all joint planning of frequencies. Comments of Lt. Col. Redd cited.

in direct command, retaining these activities under his control in addition to strategic Army communications world-wide.

Even so, General Cook did not learn of the impending Cuban operation at once. He was not informed by any General Staff officer but by Lt. Col. Redman whom DCSOPS had asked on 17 October to provide a secure voice circuit between the DA War Room in the Pentagon and CONARC at Ft. Monroe (CONARC was to constitute an intermediate headquarters between Washington and the Theater in and around Florida, unlike the Oxford operation where relations had been direct between the Pentagon and operations area).**

** Cuban After Action Rpt, p. 2. An annex to Comment No. 2, Col. W. C. Franklin, Chf Office Plans & Programs OCSigO, with basic DF DCSLOG to Chf Sig Off, sub: After Action Report Cuba, 14 Dec 62. File in P&P OCSigO.

From the point of view of Lt. Col. Redman, he and other Signal Corps personnel who had helped to man the Pentagon War Room since the Oxford

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operation had come to be regarded by General Staff officers (DCSOPS, under whom the War Room is maintained) as the OCSigO representatives to contact for every communications need. DCSOPS personnel, Redman believed, thought they were making the correct contact with the Signal Corps. They had not learned of the details of the newly reorganized Signal Corps, nothing about the USASCC as a subordinate field installation removed from the CSigO by an intervening echelon, namely Colonel Joslin's Command and Control Systems Directorate, OCSigO. Redman on his part scrupulously kept his immediate superiors informed. When he learned of the impending Cuban Crisis, he took the momentous information directly and at once to General Cook.* Even so,

* Interv with Lt. Col. Redman, cited.

Lt. Col. Redman cited another somewhat similarly slender contact between General Staff operations and the OCSigO. One Signal Corps officer served in DCSOPS during these events of the second half of 1962. He was Lt. Col. Charles J. Dominique, assigned to the Command and Control Division of DCSOPS. He therefore participated in DCSOPS plans. However, he did not report directly to the CSigO but worked both with Colonel G. D. Gray, Asst Dir CCSD OCSigO, and with Lt. Col. Redman, in USASCC.

the fact remains that the Chief Signal Officer had not received the courtesy of direct and personal invitation by that Staff in the initial planning.

That the General Staff, DCSOPS in particular, knew little of the

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existence of the USA Strategic Communications Command was evident from their next worse error, from the Signal Corps point of view. They did not specifically include the USASCC in their Cuban plans. They overlooked the fact that such an operation would require high priority for strategic communications to ensure that adequate personnel and equipment would be provided. Thus the Department of the Army put out a directive on 24 October establishing priorities for the Cuban Operation - with no priority for, or mention of, USASCC needs. Thereupon the Army Materiel Command published an implementing directive which cancelled all requirements other than those for the Cuban Task Force. This stopped all supply action for the USASCC, whose support was vitally needed, upon whose installations and operators the Task Force communications would heavily depend. Before the Army was able to correct this error, forty-eight hours of critical supply time were lost to the USASCC.*

* Cuban After Action Rpt, cited, p. 1.

Colonel K. E. Shiflet, Dir Comms Opns Directorate USASCC, commenting on 27 March upon the first draft of this study, pointed out that Operations Plans had been in existence which the USASCC was required to support. Therefore when these plans were ordered into effect, the USASCC was necessarily included in the action, even if not specifically named. But the AMC directive did not recognize this. Or, as suggested at the end of this study, the fog of the reorganization had not yet cleared away sufficiently to reveal to everyone all the details.

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The Chief Signal Officer, once he entered fully upon the Cuban Operation, reviewed and revised the contingency plan which General Staff planners had drawn up - as to force structure, command relations, and staging areas. He then took many actions. He opened up a Signal Emergency Operations Center as the focal point for signal activities. He sent a liaison officer, Lt. Col. Thomas L. Redd, Jr., to CONARC/ARLANT at Ft. Monroe to coordinate communications requirements with CONARC, with Colonel N. C. Miller (of whom more hereafter). He placed four field grade officers on special duty in the DA War Room to ensure OCSigO representation at all times. To assist CINCLANT to develop a suitable radio frequency plan for the circuits which revised requirements demanded, he placed a number of persons from the Signal Frequency Engineering Office on TDY with CINCLANT.

Finally, as additional communications were required, General Cook took such further actions as lay within his capability to provide specialized teams and equipment (the communications annexes to the original plan, OPLAN 316-62, had to undergo modifications since they had not been aimed at the Cuban type of action). The USASCC assigned 57 personnel (and committed 55 more). Some of the equipment, because of shortages of transportable strategic communications sets under CSigO control, had to be withdrawn (painfully) from other high priority claimants, as did the officers and men too, who were wrenched from their normal posts. Two troposcatter 24-channel radio terminals AN/TRC-90 were diverted from Southeast Asia and flown to Florida. Six single sideband 4-channel terminals of AN/TSC-15 were obtained

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from the Marines and shipped to ARLANT (on the latter's request). One AN/TSC-20 was obtained from the U. S. Army Electronics Command at Ft. Monmouth, now under the Army Materiel Command, and sent to Florida. Twelve cryptosecurity devices, teletypewriter, were provided to ARLANT. Teams were furnished for an AN/TSC-20 and an AN/TSC-19. The USASCC set up around-the-clock circuit operations, maintaining data on the status of all new circuits. Commercial leased telephone and teletypewriter circuits, 91 to start with, were procured at the outset of the operation. This number of leased circuits soon grew to a total of about 250.*

* (1) Cuban After Action Rpt, cited, pp. 2-3 and Tab A. (2) Comments of Col. Shiflet, 27 Mar, cited.

Col. Shiflet added that the lack of adequate voice security equipment proved as serious as the shortage of transportable strategic communication sets.

The Cuban Operation suffered from a number of communications deficiencies in addition to the shortages of essential equipment under the Chief Signal Officer's control. Foremost were deficiencies in CONARC armies arising in large part from the drastic reorganizations that had begun in mid-1962, as discussed at the outset of this study.

The CONARC commander, hit suddenly by the Cuban Crisis in October, found that he had just about wiped out his signal capabilities. Colonel Miller remained with one assistant, Lt. Col. M. D. McDowell, Jr., both

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located in a subordinate branch of the Plans and Operations Division of the DCS for Unit Training and Readiness. Miller had been stripped of the support which the former Signal Section could have provided to him. It is not surprising, then, that when Lt. Col. Redman in USASCC ordered up 91 circuits at the outset of the Crisis, Miller was unable to act quickly. He let the order stand, unable to assign implementing equipment for a week or more.*

* Interv with Lt. Col. Redman, cited.

The CONARC commander now sought to build up his signals telling Miller "You're my Signal Officer," and authorizing him to acquire personnel. But this was more quickly said than done.

When, early in November, an OCSigO officer, Lt. Col. E. A. Doran, visited CONARC, he found Colonel Miller doing his best, and well, with what he had, which was little enough to start with. Obtaining personnel took a week of valuable time as he placed levies upon signal outfits under other commands. He had to draft personnel and equipment from signal units having other specific duties to perform.** But these latter needs now had to yield

** According to the CONARC organization chart of 1 Jan 63, Col. Miller's shop had grown to include 11 people, including himself and McDowell, but still under the DCS Unit Training and Readiness. The Sig O CONARC had not yet been restored as a responsible headquarters CSigO, either for general

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Communications Electronics or as a Signal Specialist on the CONARC Staff.

Comment of Lt. Col. Redd, cited.

to the higher demands of the CONARC commander. Naturally, the functions and duties of the subordinate signal units thus robbed suffered. Colonel Miller succeeded, however, in the formation of a working operations group to support CONARC signal needs (despite cramped and noisy office spaces that had originally been a barracks latrine!). Lt. Col. Doran reported on the state of CONARC signals, 7 November 1962, as follows:

Colonel N. C. Miller is presently serving for all practical purposes as the CONARC Signal Officer. Although the former Signal Staff Section of CONARC has been functionally fragmented throughout the headquarters, Colonel Miller has found it necessary to reconstitute an operationally oriented staff capability to insure coordination of the Cuban build-up, and to assist CG, CONARC, in his role as CINC ARLANT. Colonel Miller and the officers of his Division have been working under considerable pressure. A large portion of his staff has been acquired through recent augmentations. He is operating under a constantly changing situation, no well defined operational parameters, and at the same time is faced with isolating problem areas and developing his modus operandi.*

* Memo, Lt Col E. A. Doran, Policies Br P&P Div, for Chf P&P Div

OCSigO, 9 Nov 62, sub: Rpt of Visit to Hqs CONARC, 7 Nov 62. Copy in Cuban Crisis 1962 file. TL Office USASCC.

Lt. Col. Doran thought that the success of the hastily reassembled signal group CONARC under Miller was a tribute to Signal Corps training, in that a number of Signal Corps personnel from various and different sources could team up as quickly on a crash Signal Corps need as well as they did.

Comment by Lt. Col. Doran, cited.

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Such is a brief summary of the Signal Corps role in the Cuban Crisis 1962.

Such also were some of the deficiencies of the operation, as viewed both in the OCSigO and in the field - deficiencies which resulted first and foremost from organizational changes, misconceptions and lack of information. Secondly, it ought to be pointed out that the contingency plan which was followed, OPLAN 316-62, had been drawn up before the re-organization of the summer and autumn of 1962. The Plan presumably reflected the prior organization of the Army. Was the Plan reviewed at all by the new Army structures? Was the New Army Materiel Command, for example, apprised of the Plan and all that its implementation would involve?*

* Comment and query of Lt. Col. Redd, cited.

To return to some of the conclusions of the Signal Corps After Action Report, for example, concerning the fact that DA command and control communications could not be terminated at subordinate echelons of ARLANT and ARLANT Forward. The terminal stations could not be installed because communications personnel and equipment under DA control were lacking. As expressed elsewhere in the Report, the CSigO did not have sufficient depth in communications personnel and equipment to meet the expanded requirements of the Cuban Operation. As a result of this inability of the DA to meet its responsibilities, the Signal Officers of subordinate commands had to plan

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and implement needed actions to the exclusion of their own basic missions.

A complaint of long standing reappeared - the over-classification of messages which clogged the communications circuits. The JCS message which implemented MINIMIZE was itself classified "Top Secret." A subsequent JCS message directing the military services to decrease Top Secret traffic was classified "Secret." Both of these JCS messages should have been entirely unclassified. MINIMIZE was abused also, and misunderstood (subsequently, corrective actions were taken to remedy this).

Signal Corps recommendations in its After Action Report upon the Cuban Crisis put at the top of the list the elementary lesson one might suppose had been well learned in World War II. Or, to repeat what Maj. Gen. Stoner had said some years ago, the lesson had been learned everywhere except in Washington. Stoner's comment appeared still true in 1962. Hence the first recommendation was that the Dept. of Army General Staff coordinate with the Chief Signal Officer at the start of planning or implementation of a proposed operation of any kind. Any kind of action of course requires command and control. Command and control are signal communications. And in the Army, over-all responsibility for signal communications remains with the Chief Signal Officer.

Other recommendations read that a Signal Corps officer be included in the TD of the DA War Room; that General Staff provide the OCSigO with daily contact with all its operating elements, especially with the Regional Planning Activities where plans are initiated; that all Army echelons have a signal or communications officer, or representative; that more training be

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given in service schools about message classification and procedures, and about MINIMIZE.

Because tremendous additional communications-electronics (C-E) requirements grew out of the Cuban Operation over and above those in the original plan, and because great difficulties were encountered in meeting these needs, the Signal Corps proposed that a working committee of the JCS, DA, Navy and Air Force get together and analyze the C-E aspects of the whole operation. Such joint action, above and apart from unilateral effort by the Army, was needed, the Signal Corps believed, to determine the validity of some of the increased C-E requirements and to approve such joint contingency plans as would insure adequate C-E support in any future emergency.*

* (1) Cuban After Action Rpt, cited, pp. 2-4. (2) DF, Col. W. D. Joslin, Chf CCSD, to CSigO, 30 Nov 62, sub: Cuba After Action Report. (3) DF, CO USASCC, to Chf CCSD, 23 Nov 62, same sub. All in the Cuban After Action Rpt File, P&P Office, OCSigO.

In summary, it appears obvious that military communications in the Cuban Operations suffered from improper planning, from the absence of adequate supervision and control beginning in the highest level of the Army, in the DA General Staff, where the CSigO was now placed (in Special Staff) but where he had not yet been properly integrated or "read into" Army plans and actions. Or, to put it another way, DCSOPS had not yet recognized the importance of communications-electronics as an integral capability. All

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overseas theaters have so recognized it. They all have their C-E shop right in their General Staff, so that all staff plans can be reviewed for C-E matters at the beginning, where C-E coordination can be achieved at the outset, in the top level, instead of later, at lower levels, or too late altogether.* As for the General Staff in the Washington headquarters, it

* Comment of Lt. Col. Redd, cited.

is true that there are Signal Corps officers in DCSOPS; but they become integrated into that Staff and are often put onto other duties than C-E. The Washington General Staff has a need of - the Cuban Crisis proved the need - of a much higher degree of C-E cooperation and support, of the assignment of appropriate personnel and organizational elements to achieve such support, both in the Washington headquarters and in CONARC.

In military operations, in combat, confusion is frequently attributed to the "fog of war." In the Cuban Crisis the fog of actual war was fortunately absent. But confusion remained, which in this case should perhaps be attributed to the "fog of reorganization."

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